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ABSTRACT

The complexity of the school consultation field points to the need for review of the current state of the field. To further understanding of the content and methodology utilized in consultation research, a content analysis of research articles published over the last 12 years considered the following areas: type of consultation, subject matter, setting for consultation research, research design, statistical techniques, and methodology. Analysis of articles published in the Journal of School Psychology (49 issues), Psychology in the Schools (49 issues), Professional Psychology (57 issues), and School Psychology Review (10 issues) from 1970 to mid-1982 showed that: (1) approximately 75% of consultation research concerned behavioral consultation (as opposed to mental health and organizational development consultation); (2) most research focused on individual cases rather than administrative programs, and was concerned with remediation rather than prevention; (3) most studies concerned outcome only; (4) over 50% of the research was conducted in elementary schools, while junior high school, high school, college, and special education settings received little attention; (5) comparison groups were not used routinely; (6) baseline studies and survey questionnaires were the most common research methods used; and (7) few studies used sophisticated statistical techniques. (WAS)

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Research in School Consultation: A Content Analysis of Selected Journals

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Abstract

To further understanding of content and methodology utilized in consultation research, there was an analysis of research articles published over the last twelve years. Attention is given to type of consultation, subject matter, setting for consultation research, research design, statistical techniques, and methodology. Ways of beginning to expand the knowledge base in school consultation are identified.

Research in School Consultation: A Content Analysis of Selected Journals

School consultation is a more complex field than it was in the 1960's, and this complexity points to the need for review of the current state of the field. Two decades ago, the attempt in the field was to develop conceptual models and to further practice. The writing in the 1970's was more research-oriented. Now, in 1983, the attempt is to critically examine the work to date and to identify future direction, as indicated by recent reviews of the state of the art (Gutkin & Curtis, 1982) and numerous research reviews (Medway, 1979; Meyers, Friedman, Gaughan, & Pitt, 1978; Mannino & Shore, 1983; Mannino & Shore, Note 1; Updyke, Melton, & Medway, Note 2).

While most of the review papers focus on outcome studies and attempt to identify methodological problems in order to answer the efficacy question, Medway's (1982) recent review of school consultation research over the last decade has a more global focus. Specifically, the breadth and quality of the school consultation knowledge base, the appropriateness of data analysis procedures, and the impact of consultation research findings on consultation training are considered and methodological and substantive recommendations for future directions are derived.

In order to review the current state of school consultation research, Medway (1982) reviewed the 34 articles on school consultation research which were published in seven journals in the 1970's. His analysis provides an important addition to the literature on the current status of school consultation research. However, since Medway did not define "research," it is difficult to know which articles were reviewed and evaluated. Given the relatively small number of articles (34) which were identified as research articles published in the seven journals over a decade, it is assumed that "research" was defined narrowly, and that case studies, surveys, review and evaluation studies as well as studies utilizing less traditional methodologies were omitted from consideration.

In the present consideration of the consultation research literature, two broad questions will be addressed: (1) What is the content of research in school consultation; and (2) What methodologies are utilized in school consultation research. In the following section, a brief consideration of the methodology used in the present study is presented. Next, the data relevant to each question is presented and discussed within the same section. In the final section, conclusions are drawn. At the outset it should be clear to the reader that the intent here is to consider modal content and methods in consultation research, to identify areas in which there is a paucity, and to ponder about and to project from these findings.

Method

In an effort to consider the content and methodologies of consultation research, a content analysis was done of school consultation articles which were published in three journals (Journal of School Psychology, Professional Psychology, and Psychology in the Schools) from 1970 to the middle of 1982. In addition, School Psychology Review was considered from its inception in 1980 to the middle of 1982. Thus a total of 165 issues were considered, or 49 issues from Journal of School Psychology, 49 issues from Psychology in the Schools, 57 issues from Professional Psychology and 10 issues from School Psychology Review. These journals were selected because they include most research articles on school consultation. In addition, they are probably read most frequently by school psychologists and therefore may have the greatest impact on the field of School Psychology. Clearly, however, there are other journals within psychology which publish articles on school consultation as well as other professions which publish journals and which provide consultation in the schools.

Consultation was defined as involving a triadic network (the client, the consultee and the consultant) and indirect service, and the goals of consultation were seen as involving some aspect of mental health in the school. Thus, articles were considered which included prevention or remediation as the primary goal and which

involved individual cases or administrative programs as the focus. The three approaches to school consultation (mental health, behavioral, organization development) fall in here. In general then, consultation is defined as the process in which the mental health professional assists another, the consultee, regarding clients for whom the latter has responsibility. In schools, the clients are students, whereas the consultees are teachers, administrators, aides or other school staff. For a fuller definition, see Alpert (1976). Research was defined broadly to include case studies, surveys, reviews, evaluation studies, and traditional research methods as well as articles which suggest new methodologies. Thus, articles were considered even if the primary purpose of the consultation was other than research or evaluation, if it included a research component. In the period considered and across the four journals, a total of 132 articles met these criteria.

A sign system was utilized for categorizing. One article could be coded several times within one category or not coded at all. For example, Medway's (1979) review of the results of studies on the effectiveness of school consultation was not coded for types of consultation, as the categories "case" and "administrative consultation" were not relevant. In contrast, Medway & Forman's (1980) article concerning psychologist's and teacher's reactions to mental health

and behavioral school consultation was coded for "psychologist attitude to consultation" and "consultee attitude to consultation" as both were salient.

Categorizing was done independently by the two authors, and disagreements between them were resolved by the second and a third coder. The second and third coders worked from abstracts and notes developed by the first coder. Clearly, the categories developed are not the only categories which could throw light on content and method in school consultation research. Other authors may have considered other categories or, in addition, areas other than content and method as salient.

Results and Discussion

In order to consider the content of consultation research, content analyses were done concerning type of consultation, subject matter, and setting for consultation research. Regarding type of consultation, the data was analyzed in two ways: first, based on the three major models of consultation (mental health, behavioral, and organization development) presently practiced in schools; and second, based on Caplan's (1970) typology (client-centered case consultation, consultee-centered case consultation, program-centered administrative consultation, and consultee-centered administrative consultation). There was a total of 132 consultation research articles published in the four journals over the time indicated. Of these, 44 articles concerned behavioral consultation while 9

and 6 dealt with mental health consultation and organization development respectively. Thus, 44/59 or 75% of the consultation research, in which the type of consultation is identified by the investigators, concerns behavioral consultation. It may be that the amount of research within the three models is reflective of the amount of practice and, in this light, the behavioral preponderance is not surprising. In Martin & Meyer's (1980) report of the results of an investigation of the consultation practices of school psychologists, they indicate that consultants conceptualize their consultation efforts in a humanistic or behavioristic framework. Students are trained in one model, usually to the exclusion of other models, and behavioral consultation appears to be the model which is most frequently taught. Gutkin & Curtis (1982) state that the behavioral and ecological models of human behavior become the theoretical foundation on which school-based consultation was built, and that it appears to be one of the most frequently practiced forms of consultation.

A negative attitude toward mental health consultation appears prevalent in school consultation literature. Meyers, Parsons, & Martin (1979), for example, question the use of psychodynamic approaches and offer nonpsychoanalytic explanations to account for consultee behavior. Further, based on findings concerning reasons why consultees need consultation, Gutkin (1981) calls into question the utility of psychodynamically oriented techniques in school consultation. Some writers indicate that the negative attitude

toward mental health consultation is supported by research in which the consultation models are compared. Medway (1979), for example, indicates that, at present, there is the most empirical support for behavioral consultation. Tombari & Davis (1979) discuss research in which the effectiveness of behavioral consultation is indicated. There are several other investigators who have compared the approaches (Bergan, Byrnes, & Kratochwill, 1979; Fairchild, 1976; Jason, Ferone, & Anderogg, 1979; Medway & Forman, 1980; Wenger, 1979; and White & Fine, 1976). In the opinion of the present authors, the lack of focus on mental health consultation is unwarranted. Some of the research which throws into question the utility of psychodynamically-oriented techniques suffers from methodological flaws. Further, there is little literature that directly compares the models (Medway, 1979) and, as it is concluded in one comparison study (Jason et al., 1979), complex interrelationships exist among the models and the effects. Clearly, since behavioral techniques are data based, it is easier to demonstrate their efficacy.

Regarding classification by Caplan's typology, according to Caplan the primary goals of consultation are remediation and prevention and the primary foci are individual cases and administrative programs.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 indicates which types of consultation fall within each category, as well as the frequency of the articles within each

classification. Forty-six studies or 63% (46/73) focus on individual cases (client-centered case consultation and consultee-centered case consultation) while 27 or 37% (27/73) focus on administrative programs (program-centered administrative consultation and consultee-centered administrative consultation). All 20 cases of program evaluation fell under program-centered administrative consultation. Thus the focus is more on individual cases than on administrative programs. Program evaluation comprises 27% (20/73) of the consultation and does not comprise the majority of the consultation research activity.

Further, 40 studies or 63% (40/64) had remediation as the primary goal (client-centered case = 15 + program-centered administrative = 25). In 9 studies it was unclear whether the case consultation was client-centered or consultee-centered and, subsequently, these studies could not be considered here. This relative sparsity of consultation research with a preventive goal is surprising given the historical development of consultation and the emphasis on prevention in the theoretical writing. Almost all the articles concerned with prevention as a primary goal (18/19 or 95%) focused on individual consultation. Only one study focused on administrative programs.

Next the subject matter was considered. For purposes of this paper, the topics of the 132 articles were organized around seven

categories. Those articles which fell in more than one category were so coded. When topics were rank ordered in terms of frequency, studies concerning process or outcome or studies relating process variables to outcome were first with 78 or 39% (78/200); second were studies concerning perceptions and expectations of consultants and consultees with 44 or 22% (44/200); third were articles in which research methods or measurement was considered with 27 or 14% (27/200); fourth were studies that dealt with pre- or inservice training with 26 or 13% (26/200); fifth were studies concerning consultant and consultee characteristics with 11 or 6% (11/200); sixth were studies of roles and functions of consultants and consultees with 8 or 4% (8/200); and last were studies in which two or more consultation models were compared with 6 or 3% (6/200).

The first ranked item was analyzed further. Forty or 51% (40/78) of the studies are concerned with outcome; 18 or 23% (18/78) are concerned with the process of consultation; and 20 or 26% (20/78) relate process to outcome. Thus, most of the research focuses on the question: Is consultation effective? Mannino & Shore (Note 1) also found this emphasis in their study of doctoral dissertations through the year 1979.

Medway (1982) indicates that the 1970's could be characterized as the decade when researchers first began to seriously consider processes associated with successful outcomes. While this may be so, it appears, based on the present consideration, that the majority of the research focuses on outcome only. Further, this is occurring

despite investigator's comments (Mannino & Shore, Note 2; Medway, 1982) that it is misleading to ask about the efficacy of consultation without taking into account selected process variables. The present focus on accountability within School Psychology may explain why the majority of studies emphasize goal achievement.

Within the outcome and process-outcome research, most change is assessed within the consultees. Also change is frequently assessed in combination with client or school and consultees. The outcome variables which have been considered cover a wide range and include, for example, behavior change (service utilization, cooperation, administrative notices, assertion, implementation of techniques, requests for workshops, disruptive behavior, problem clarification skills, praise); attitude change (self-esteem, satisfaction); knowledge change; and change in expectations and perceptions. Some of the process variables which have been considered include: consultant style; consultant verbal and nonverbal consultation skills; consultant power; and consultee attitudes.

Clearly more work is needed which relates consultant behavior to consultation outcome. Bergan & Tombari's work is exemplary in this area (Bergan, 1977; Bergan & Tombari, 1975, 1976). They have developed a system with which to analyze the verbal communication process occurring during consultation and indices of effectiveness for each aspect of the communication process. Their work is beginning

to throw light on the relationship between consultant communication behavior and consultation outcomes (See Tombari & Bergan, 1978; Bergan, Byrnes, & Kratochwill, 1979). More work, however, is needed.

Lastly, under content, the setting for the research was considered. In those studies in which settings were identified, 5 or 11% (5/46) concerned the pre-school or kindergarten, 27 or 59% (27/46) concerned elementary school, and 1 or 2% (1/46) concerned a junior high school. The present investigators could find no studies which identified the high school as their research setting. Further 13 or 28% (13/46) identified special education as the setting. If the studies which concerned special education also indicated level, these studies were coded more than once. In Mannino & Shore's study of consultation research dissertations (1983), they found that 75% of the dissertations that specified settings were done in schools. Further, they found that the elementary level was the most popular setting (50%), while 8.5%, 4.7%, 3.1%, and 3.1% of the studies were conducted in secondary schools, special education, junior high or middle school, and some combination of school levels respectively. Clearly their finding that most consultation research is done in elementary school is consistent with the present findings. The lack of attention to special education settings is noteworthy given PL94-142 and analogous state legislation. The lack of research in this setting may indicate that little consultation is occurring

within special education. Although consultation activity is consistent with the intent of PL94-142 as Alpert & Trachtman (1980) and Gibbins (1978) indicate, it appears that the law has inhibited its practice (Gutkin & Tieger, 1979). It is interesting to note that of the 11 studies conducted in special education settings, 5 were conducted prior to 1972 and 5 were conducted since 1980. More consultation research will probably be conducted in special education settings in the future.

The lack of attention to junior high school, high school, and college settings is noteworthy also. Medway & Nagle (1982) indicate that little has been written on the practice of school consultation at the high school level. Why is there relative neglect of the older child and young adult? It may be that psychologists are not trained to work with this population, as the research by Carroll, Bretzing, & Harris (1981) indicates, and/or have comparatively less understanding of adolescent development (Medway & Nagle, 1982). Given that adolescence can be a troubling period of development -- as indicated by statistics on run-aways, teenage pregnancy, teenage alcoholism and teenage suicide; and a difficult population to teach and to administer -- as indicated by statistics on truancy, delinquency, vandalism, and racial conflicts, it is surprising that more consultation activity is not occurring at this level. The need to direct more work at this level is further supported by the studies of life-span researchers which indicates that individuals are capable of change throughout the entire life span (Brim & Kagan, 1980).

In summary, approximately 75% of the consultation research in which the type of consultation is identified by the investigators concerns behavioral consultation. Further a consideration of Caplan's typology indicates that most research focuses on individual cases rather than administrative programs and concerns studies which have remediation rather than prevention as the primary goal. Also it was found that more studies concern process and/or outcome and, within this group, more studies concern outcome only. Also receiving relatively high attention are studies concerning perceptions and expectations of consultants and consultees. Lastly, the analysis indicates that over 50% of the research is conducted in elementary schools, and that junior high school, high school, college, and special education settings receive little attention. The modal content is clear. The areas of paucity are clear also, although different investigators may draw different implications from these. It seems to the present investigators that there is a need for more research on mental health and organization development; more research which has prevention as its focus; more research on process associated with successful outcome rather than outcome studies only; and more research occurring in the junior high school and high school and special education settings.

In order to consider the method of consultation research, content analyses were done concerning research design, statistical techniques, and methodology utilized. Regarding research design,

13 of the studies utilized a pre-post design, and 17 had control groups. Given that the baseline technique is a source of experimental control, the 24 studies utilizing the baseline technique can be combined with the control studies, and this indicates that 41 studies or 31% 41/132) used a source of experimental control. This number, however, is difficult to interpret because at least in some of the studies (21 case studies, 21 articles concerned with research or evaluation methods, 6 studies concerned with measurement), experimental control may not be indicated. Kannino & Shore (note 1) however, reviewed research literature in mental health consultation through middle 1978 and found that 68.5% of the studies used comparison groups and Medway (1979) reviewed 44 school consultation outcome studies conducted from 1972-1979 and found that only 60% employed control or comparison groups. It appears, however, that comparison groups are not used routinely.

Regarding method, rank ordered in terms of frequency are the following. With 23% of the studies, survey questionnaires (31) and baseline (30) studies were tied for first. Third were studies involving linguistic analyses (13 or 1%). In addition, there were a few studies involving time analyses and time series (9), interviews (6), and hypothetical cases (4). The relatively high number of studies involving survey questionnaires was found also by Medway (1982).

Regarding statistical techniques, in 21 studies (16%=21/132), percentages were accepted as indicating real differences and no further statistical analyses were done. Analyses of variance was done in 15 or 11% (15/132) of the studies, inter-rater reliability

was established in 10 or 8% (10/132) of the studies, and Chi-square was utilized in 6 or 5% (6/132) of the studies. Statistics used in 5 or fewer studies include: multivariate analyses, t tests, factor analyses, multiple regression, q sorts, Whitney-Mann test, correlations, and discriminant analyses. Medway (1982) also found a relatively high percent of studies using analysis of variance.

In sum, it appears that comparison groups are not used routinely. Further, baseline studies and survey questionnaires are most common and relatively few studies use sophisticated statistical techniques, although the techniques used may have been appropriate given the questions asked and data available.

Conclusions

What does this tell us about consultation research? The analysis reveals that there does not seem to be continuity and follow-through in research on consultation. The literature represents discrete studies rather than systematic, programmatic research. Further, relatively unsophisticated statistical techniques are utilized. It also indicates some areas of paucity as well as areas in which there is relatively more research. As indicated, survey questionnaire and baseline studies are frequently utilized. Most of the research is behavioral, focuses on individual cases, and has a remediation focus. Further, most of the research concerns elementary schools. Obviously these findings are related to each other in some complex way.

Without question, research in this area is difficult to do, as Barry (1970), Caplan (1970), Medway (1982) and Stephenson (1973) attest. In addition, given that consultation is a broad and complex field, it is difficult to identify prescriptions for research. If we want to begin to expand our knowledge bases, more research should be conducted on mental health and organizational development, on administrative programs, on consultation which has prevention as a primary goal, and on consultation which occurs beyond elementary school and, in addition, in special education settings. In addition, more studies relating process variables to outcome are indicated as are programmatic studies and studies incorporating more experimental control, utilizing follow-up, and using more sophisticated methodology. Also, the investigators noted that in many studies, data was collected on one party only. The need to collect data on client, consultee, consultant, and system variables is indicated.

Given the economic restrictions of the 1980's, it is unlikely that the indicated expansion in research will occur. Probably more consultation research will be small scale, and exploratory and descriptive rather than large scale and quantitative. This is a prediction and not a prescription. If this does happen, we should capitalize on it and attempt to develop more hypotheses which can be more rigorously tested at another time.

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Table 1

Content of Studies: Classification by Caplanian Typology

		Primary Goal		
		Remediation	Prevention	Total
Focus	Individual cases	Client-centered case consultation: 15	Consultee-centered case consultation: 22 + 9[a]	46
	Administrative Program	Program-centered administrative consultation: 25	Consultee-centered administrative consultation: 2	27
Total		40	24 + 9[a]	73

[a]Nine cases could not be classified with respect to focus.